GEOGRAPHIC NEWS BULLETINS

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THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY

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General Headquarters, Washington, D. C.

Contents for Week of May 11, 1931. Vol. X. No. 12

1. The "Banana Coast" of Honduras.
2. Each Unit of Trans-Asia Expedition Is a Complete Trackless Train.
3. Peiping, Where a Monastery Affords Vacation Quarters.
4. Underseas Gold Mines Lure the Ship Salvager.
5. Platinum: A Cubic Inch Can Stretch Twice around the Earth!

NOTE TO TEACHERS: The next issue of the Geographic News Bulletins will be published upon the reopening of schools in October. The Bulletins are not issued during the summer vacation months. It will facilitate the handling and prompt mailing of the Bulletins in the fall if teachers will apply now for the Bulletins they need for next year. See application form following Bulletin No. 3.

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FREE-WHEELING, ONE-MAN-POWER TAXIS OF PEIPING

Well-to-do ladies of the former Chinese capital travel about in jinrikishas drawn by coolies. These society vehicles are 1930 models, with mud-guards, rubber tires, lights and one-man top. Many of the jinrikishas used in the Orient are manufactured in New Jersey (See Bulletin No. 3).

HOW TEACHERS MAY OBTAIN THE BULLETINS

The Geographic News Bulletins are published weekly throughout the school year (thirty issues) and will be mailed to teachers for one year upon receipt of 25 cents (in stamps or money order). Entered as second-class matter, January 27, 1922, at the Post Office at Washington, D. C., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Accepted for mailing at special rate of postage provided for in section 1103, Act of October 3, 1917, authorized February 9, 1922.

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The "Banana Coast" of Honduras

WORLD history makes frequent mention of the "Gold Coast," the "Ivory Coast," and the "Slave Coast" of Africa. Into the news of to-day flashes the "Banana Coast." Revolutionary uprisings in the northern part of Honduras have brought this little-known region into the public eye. Four tiny tropical ports suddenly became the destination of several American cruisers and merchant vessels, who stood by to take off American refugees if necessary.

Puerto Cortés, Tela, Ceiba, and Trujillo may have an unfamiliar ring to the ears of the average American, but their roadsteads are regular calling places for snow-white tropical fruit steamers which bring back, among other things, 35 per cent of Uncle Sam's total import of the nutritious banana. Through these little palm-shaded villages 22,667,000 bunches of bananas poured in 1929, giving Honduras world leadership in production of the fruit.

"Land of Always After-Dinner"

Between steamers, however, life along the "Banana Coast" is idyllic and simple, and the entire region is still the tropical paradise that O. Henry called "the land of always after-dinner." Natives know the regular boats by their whistles, and the only other excitement is the arrival and departure of fruit trains on the spur lines which penetrate, for a short distance, the enveloping jungles.

Most important of the four is Puerto Cortés, the terminus of the railroad which runs inland to Portrerillos, and there connects with a highway to the Honduran capital, Tegucigalpa, high on the mountain tableland. Puerto Cortés has a splendid natural harbor, which in the swashbuckling days of buccaneers was a haven for pirates and smugglers from all parts of the Spanish Main. Here Richard Harding Davis obtained material for some of his "soldier of fortune" yarns, and here, also, was the last headquarters of the old Louisiana Lottery after it was driven out of the United States.

Tela, 25 miles east of Puerto Cortés, and the terminus of the privately-owned railway to Progresso, for possession of which forces fought south of the city, is more up-to-date than its sister cities along the coast. Those who are connected with the banana business in town have modern homes, electric light, and telephones. A wireless station keeps the town in touch with the outside world. During normal times five ships loaded with bananas leave Tela every week.

Dates from Conquistadores

Ceiba is a settlement of reinforced concrete houses and corrugated iron sheds. Much of the city was burned to the ground in 1914, and when the town was rebuilt it was decided that concrete would replace the frame dwellings characteristic of the "Banana Coast." A long steel and concrete pier extends from the waterfront a considerable distance into the blue waters of the Caribbean. Its port is an open roadstead and in case of a "norther" steamers must proceed to sea to ride the storm out.

Trujillo can trace its history back to the days of the Spanish Conquistadores. It was established by Hernando Cortez in 1522 and was a flourishing, fortified town a hundred years before Henry Hudson sailed up New York Bay. A private

© *H. Wimmer*

BANANA BUNCHES GROW UPSIDE DOWN!

A cutting "gang" usually consists of three men. The "cutter," using a long pole to which a special kind of knife is attached, nicks the tree trunk—in reality a leaf-sheath—a few feet beneath the bunch, the weight of which makes the trunk bend where it has been cut. The bananas are eased upon the shoulders of the "backer," who carries them to the "muleman," or to freight cars. The tree is then cut off near the roots, its decayed stalk acting as a fertilizer for the soil (See Bulletin No. 1).

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Each Unit of Trans-Asia Expedition Is a Complete Trackless Train

EACH of the two units of the Trans-Asia Expedition, with which the National Geographic Society is coöperating, is a complete trackless train. Seven tractor motor cars, making up the Pamir unit, left Beyrouth, Syria, April 4, and have reached Baghdad. Another seven cars, the China unit, left Peiping, April 6, and will meet the Pamir unit at Kashgar, Chinese Turkestan, beyond the "roof of Asia."

"The camel, proverbial ship of the desert, is completely outclassed by these new tractors which, while they cannot go five days without a drink, can carry ten to twenty times as much cargo (including their own gasoline and oil) and are capable of from 5 to 20 miles an hour, against the average camel's 3 to 4," writes Maynard Owen Williams, staff correspondent of the National Geographic Society with the expedition, which is headed by Georges-Marie Haardt, noted French explorer.

A "Club Car" of the Desert

"Here is how the trackless train is organized. The first car is the leader's, carrying, in addition to the driver, the leader, and three other men, the different cases holding stationery, typewriters, archives, maps, library, artists' materials, hunting guns, ammunition, field glasses and compasses. Its trailer, like the other six, has a capacity for 2,500 pounds of cargo, most of which is devoted to sound motion picture equipment.

"The lower part of each car's trailer carries beds and bedding in water-tight cases. At the corners of the upper part of every trailer are mirrored washstands, set into doors which close down on two suitcases and a shoe box, in which each man carries his supplies and personal effects. In the trailer also are three-legged stools, folding chairs, two folding tables, a canvas-reservoired shower bath, and a tent to be stretched from the car body to tent poles when night stopping-places are reached.

First Sound Pictures of Central Asia

"The second car is reserved for the scientists and their paraphernalia—cases of botanists' supplies, taxidermy supplies, meteorology equipment and specimens of rocks; also the cameras, films and plates. The third car transports the moving picture cameras and photophone attachments. In it is an endless array of cables, batteries, and microphones, which will be used to make the first sound-picture record of the songs, chants and rituals of little-known people in central Asia. Car four is called the location truck. It contains the electric power plant, cables and other accessories needed at prolonged stops.

"The fifth car in the train is the wireless truck, with powerful sending and receiving equipment which is expected to keep the expedition constantly in touch with the outside world. The kitchen car, always important in every expedition, is sixth. As in the up-to-date American dining car the expedition chef will be able to present dinner dishes at the end of the day's run labeled, 'Baked on the Car To-day.' The truck body holds a kitchen of ample proportions, and, although everything has to be lashed down to meet the rocking of the tractors in roadless regions, bread and cakes can be baked and chops done brown en route. There is no need to worry about broken dishes. All of them are of stainless metal.

fruit railroad connects it with the interior. This section of the "Banana Coast" has been sold over and over again by promoters of various kinds of exploitation schemes, most of which have never materialized. Trujillo Bay is some 7 miles in width and affords safe anchorage against the prevailing winds.

In addition to bananas this part of Honduras also produces sugar, cacao, coconuts, and mahogany. Vast mineral resources in the interior await the extension of railway lines and highways.

Note: Col. Charles A. Lindbergh's article "To Bogotá and Back by Air," in the May, 1928, *National Geographic Magazine*, contains recent pictures and descriptive matter of Honduras. See also: "A Little Journey in Honduras," August, 1916; and "Countries of the Caribbean," February, 1913. Students interested in banana plantations should consult also "Jamaica, Isle of Many Rivers," January, 1927; "Guatemala, Land of Volcanoes and Progress," November, 1926; and "Costa Rica, Land of the Banana," February, 1922.

Bulletin No. 1, May 11, 1931.

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THE "CASA PRESIDENCIA," OR WHITE HOUSE OF HONDURAS, AT TEGUCIGALPA

Compare this artistic government building with others pictured in the following GEOGRAPHIC NEWS BULLETINS: "Palace of an Absolute Monarch," Gwalior, India, March 2, 1931; "Argentina's Majestic Capitol," March 9, 1931; "The Governor's Palace at San Juan," April 6, 1931; and "The Capitol of Cuba," April 20, 1931.

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Peiping, Where a Monastery Affords Vacation Quarters

LOOKING for a summer cottage?

If you have boat fare to Peiping you can pick up a bargain in one of the many Buddhist temples scattered through the Western Hills outside of the former Chinese capital. Some are so small and deserted that they are rented out entirely as vacation retreats to perspiring city dwellers of Peiping's foreign colony. Others are large monasteries crowning mighty hilltops and furnishing shelter, for the most part, to innumerable monks. The none-too-clean and indolent inmates seem oddly out of tune with the decaying beauty of sacred walls and shrine-filled courtyards.

The Visitor Cooks His Own

The larger monasteries, like Christian hospices of medieval Europe, rent vacant rooms to the passing traveler.

The visitor is expected to furnish his own bed and bedding, and, especially if he is a foreigner, to provide his own food. After one look at Chinese culinary methods in a monastery kitchen the visitor from overseas is quite anxious to comply with local custom.

Thus has grown up a habit among foreigners resident in Peiping of taking their own "boy" and cook, camp beds and provisions, and "doing" the Western Hill monasteries that lie off the main line of travel. The nearer temples may be reached directly by motor, but to visit the more remote, and, incidentally, the most beautiful, bag and baggage must be transshipped to a small caravan of donkeys for a tramp through rough country.

"Number One Boy" Is Advance Agent

Under the able generalship of the "number one boy" the donkey caravan soon pushes ahead to set up camp in vacant quarters rented from the priests. The traveler himself is quickly left behind to solitary contemplation of an uninterrupted sweep of bare, rugged, wind-swept hills topped by a cloudless blue sky, on a trail that climbs ever upward.

Toward dusk barking of dogs behind high stone walls betokens arrival at the monastery's outer gates, great creaking panels that remind one of the entrance to a donjon keep. Then a hurried panorama of monks with flaring torches raised high above their heads holding snarling watch dogs at bay. Quarters are made ready by the "boy," a first-class dinner from soup to nuts served in style, but prepared on a two-by-four charcoal brazier. A stroll through moonlit temple courts hoary with the age of centuries.

At last, bed, the comfort of one's own sheets from home, but under the shadow of the "Great Gawd Budd" himself.

Note: China, its fascinating people and customs, are described in "Glories of Minya Konka;" "Carrying the Color Camera through Unmapped China," *National Geographic Magazine*, October, 1930; "Seeking the Mountains of Mystery," February, 1930; "Life among the Lamas of Choni," November, 1928; "Ho for the Soochow Ho," "The Geography of China," "Life Afloat in China," and "New China and the Printed Page," June, 1927. It is from Peiping that the China unit of the Trans-Asia Expedition started for Kashgar, see Bulletin No. 2.

Bulletin No. 3, May 11, 1931.

"Car number seven is the repair shop—both human and mechanical. In this [redacted] truck are condensed a machine shop for minor repairs to the trucks, and an operating room for whatever emergency may befall the members of the party. Both remedies and surgical equipment are carried.

"All the cars outwardly are similar in appearance and each has a six-cylinder, water-cooled engine. The two front wheels are like those of an ordinary pneumatic-tired truck. In place of rear wheels are [redacted] devices with rubber treads. Instead of a bumper each car has a tank mounted forward on an axis. When the front wheels sink in sand or in marshy ground the tank supports the weight of the engine and revolves when the [redacted] push the car ahead.

"Each of the Pamir cars is capable of surmounting a 30 degree grade. Some idea of the steepness of such a slope can be obtained when it is noted that the steepest grades on improved roads in the United States seldom exceed half that angle."

Note: See also "Trans-Asia Expedition Member Visits the United States," GEOGRAPHIC NEWS BULLETIN, March 9, 1931. For supplementary reading of the region which the Pamir unit of the Trans-Asia Expedition has traversed between Beyrouth, Syria, and Baghdad, Iraq, see "Crusader Castles of the Near East," March, 1931, *National Geographic Magazine*; "New Alphabet of the Ancients Is Unearthed," October, 1930; "New Light on Ancient Ur," January, 1930; "Skirting the Shores of Sunrise," December, 1926; "A Visit to Three Arab Kingdoms," May, 1923; "Antioch the Glorious," August, 1920; and "Syria, the Land Link of History's Chain," November, 1919. The new map of "Europe and the Near East," a supplement with the December, 1929, issue of the *National Geographic Magazine*, shows the principal towns and cities between Beyrouth and Baghdad.

Bulletin No. 2, May 11, 1931.

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ROOMS WITHOUT BATH AT BAGHDAD

Although the ancient capital of the Kingdom of Iraq has a number of modern hotels most of the native inns, or khans, are similar to the one shown above. Animals are stabled in an open courtyard and the guests occupy cells above and below the balcony. Access is by a single wooden gate, locked at night to bar intruders. The Pamir unit of the Trans-Asia Expedition has reached Baghdad.

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Underseas Gold Mines Lure the Ship Salvager

REPORTS that a Seattle concern will attempt to raise the steamship *Islander*, which sank with heavy loss of life and fortune in Stephen's Pass, Alaska, in 1901, calls attention to the vast amount of water-buried treasure, and the danger spots for sea captains throughout the world. More than 160 major ships have sunk within diving distance of the surface of Alaskan waters alone.

Last year salvage operations to recover gold worth millions in the S. S. *Egypt*, sunk off France, brought into the day's news another famous graveyard of the sea.

Pointe du Raz, off which the *Egypt* was sunk after a collision, is one of the most dangerous headlands of France because all ships coming south out of the English Channel bound for Bordeaux, the Mediterranean, Africa, or South America, must clear its toothed and hungry rocks (See illustration, next page).

Snared 500 Ships

It is to France what the Goodwin Sands and The Lizard are to England, and what Nauset Beach on Cape Cod, Nantasket Beach south of Boston, Nantucket Island, and Diamond Shoal off Cape Hatteras are to the United States, and King Island is to Australia.

Nantucket is credited with snaring 500 ships from the time of its settlement to 1876. Lighthouses, buoys, light ships, better weather report service, increased use of motor power, and, now, radio direction finding have made the death corners of the sea less dangerous, but they still exact their toll.

"For 12 hours we passed skeletons of what had once been ships," writes Melville Chater, in a communication to the National Geographic Society, describing a motor trip along the hard beach of Hatteras Banks. "These were blanched victims of the sea and sand, their upstanding ribs resembling files of gravestones, their forests of protruding spikes being the grisly grass of the desert-like expanse. At one point we counted fourteen wrecks within 100 yards. Due to the enormous tonnage of steel hulls imbedded in the Diamond, there is a magnetic deviation of the compass amounting to 8 degrees."

"Ship Swallower" of Thames

Goodwin Sands, a trap lying just beyond the mouth of the Thames, has long held the title of "ship swallower," innumerable vessels having been buried in its wastes. Small King Island off the Australian coast counts, to date, forty ships brought to an untimely end on its shores.

Cape Horn at the southern tip of South America and Cape of Good Hope at the end of Africa have villainous reputations among sailors. In the same class fall the rock-cluttered straits off the south end of Japan where typhoons out of the Philippines sweep whole fleets to destruction.

Each of the world's worst waters has its own peculiarities. Cape Cod and Nantucket are most dangerous in a northeaster when the howling wind tries to drive ships, Europe express lane steamers, coastwise steamers and New England fishing schooners, onto the sandy shores that run at right angles to the direction of the gale.

Hatteras Has "Steepest Waves"

Cape Hatteras, jutting far out into the Atlantic, extends its shoal water still farther out. Northeasters, blowing contrary to the flow of the Gulf Stream, build up over these shoals the highest, steepest waves to be found along the coast. Jamming their noses into toppling walls of water vessels begin to founder and drift helpless onto Diamond Shoal.

Goodwin Sands, 8 miles long, 4 miles wide, sprawls like a spider awaiting its prey off the coast from Deal, England. Awash at high tide, large areas of the Goodwin Sands at low tide offer a hard, dry surface. Ships going to or from London, to north England ports, Belgium, Holland and Germany, have to pass close to the Sands which are studded with the bones of victims. Worst of all ocean hazards, the Goodwin Sands, logically became the scene of the first triumphs of modern life saving.

Recently this ship swallower changed its rôle and became the life saver of the crew and passengers of a ship of the air. An air liner encountered trouble over the English Channel. Its pilot, unable to make land, noticed that the Goodwin Sands had been left bare by the ebbing tide. Swooping down he made a safe landing and by frantic signaling got his

© "Russ-Photo"

THE GROVES ARE SOVIET WORKERS' FIRST CLASSROOMS

A Russian factory-school class learning about trees, flowers, birds and natural science in the outdoors. Young workers divide the day into equal periods of work and study (See Bulletin No. 5).

NOTE TO TEACHERS

The attached blank may be used in ordering Bulletins for the coming year:

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Washington, D. C.

Kindly send.....copies weekly of the GEOGRAPHIC NEWS BULLETINS for the school year of 1931-32, for classroom use, to

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Platinum: A Cubic Inch Can Stretch Twice around the Earth!

A PURE platinum medal, believed to be the only one in existence in this country, has been struck at the United States mint in Philadelphia from the die of the Herbert Hoover Presidential Medal.

Soviet Russia to-day is the chief producer of this heavy, steel-gray metal, one of the most useful and costly known. Almost 100,000 troy ounces of platinum were placed on the market by Russia in 1929, more than double the figure of its nearest competitor, Colombia. South Africa was third with 21,000 troy ounces. Before the World War, Russia satisfied nearly all the world demand, but yielded leadership to Colombia in 1920.

Is Gradually Getting Cheaper

Although platinum is still the most valuable of the better-known metals, its value has declined steadily in recent years from $110 an ounce, to $60 an ounce, to $30 an ounce to-day. Substitution of other cheaper metals and the opening of new fields has made platinum the most economically volatile of metals. The price trend is still downward since new Canadian fields, which in 1929 produced only 28 ounces, now promise to make the Dominion north of us one of the leaders in platinum mining.

The world demands about 170,000 troy ounces, or about 6 tons, of platinum each year.

Fashions in jewelry have turned toward platinum, so jewelers take 57 per cent of the annual production. Yet the world demand for platinum to-day is less than the pre-war demand. High prices compelled industrial and scientific users of platinum to find substitutes.

Hopes To Attain Prewar Production

While Russia was rehabilitating her platinum industry she adhered to an international agreement limiting the supply that reached the market. But in 1927 the Soviet Government, not satisfied with the platinum quota allotted her, withdrew and began to sell independently. Russian platinum production rose to 92,000 ounces in 1926 and to 100,000 ounces in 1929. To equal her prewar production of 200,000 ounces annually was the objective of the Soviet State engineers. Meanwhile platinum prices have slumped.

A platinum dredge is a monstrous engine of industry. The body of it looks like an overgrown, ill-designed houseboat. A great snout armed with buckets protrudes from one end. It is kin to the earthworm for it eats ground, and moves into the hole created by its enormous appetite. A platinum dredge digs its own lake to float in as it moves along. The dredge must consume quantities of sand and gravel to obtain a little platinum. In South Africa 24 ounces per ton is considered pay dirt.

The "Triumphal Start" of Dredge Eleven

Five dredges built in San Francisco were landed at Leningrad in 1926 and shipped in pieces over the Trans-Siberian Railroad to Tagil in the foothills of the Ural Mountains. Seventeen months after the construction of the hull began, the first dredge was launched. Representatives of the Supreme Council in Moscow came for the "triumphal start of the Electric Dredge No. 11." Platinum mining, like most Russian industries, is government business.

Labor is cheap in the Ural Mountains. Peasants still wash the gravel for platinum as they have done for a century, but the Soviet Government finds American machinery more economical than Russian backs. Russia has had long experience with platinum. Natives mined it when it was worth only a quarter as much as gold.

Tried Platinum Coinage

About one hundred years ago Russia tried platinum coinage. By 1845 the Russian mint had struck off 1,400,000 platinum coins. But the market cost of the metal fluctuated so much that the practice was abandoned.

Practically all platinum comes from placer deposits. That is, gravel and sand banks which have washed down from rocks containing platinum. The exception to this rule is the platinum deposit recently discovered in South Africa. Here the metal occurs in rocks in sufficient quantity to warrant shaft mining. The platinum, however, is in such a state

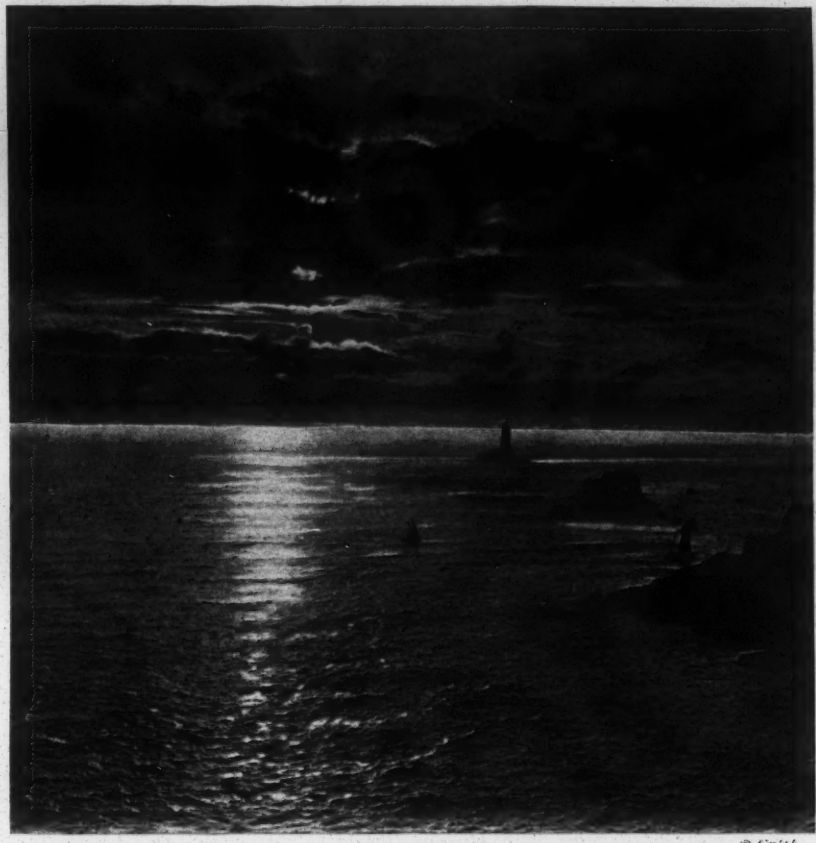
passengers, cargo and himself taken off in a boat before the returning tide overwhelmed his plane.

Steamships of to-day have much less trouble with Cape Horn than the old-time sailing ships that beat against the prevailing westerly gales of the roaring forties. With rigging iced, with no sun to take bearings from, many a skipper lost his ship in the battle to make westing. One vessel which tried for more than fifty days to round Cape Horn finally gave it up and went to Asia the other way around the world.

Not the least of the dangers eliminated from graveyards of the sea both abroad and in the United States are those which were created not by Nature but by human beach scavengers. Nags Head on the North Carolina beaches perpetuates the memory of the professional wreckers who would hobble a horse with a lantern hung on its neck. Captains of sailing vessels picking their way carefully through dangerous waters would sight the bobbing light that looked like that of another ship. Approach to the beacon soon brought the vessel to grief and the crew to death, perhaps, while the wreckers paced the beach to snatch up the cargo that the sea rolled out of the broken vessel.

Note: See, for supplementary reading, "Viking Life in the Storm-Cursed Faeroes," November 1930, *National Geographic Magazine*; "Rounding the Horn in a Windjammer," February 1931; "Collarin' Cape Cod," October 1925; "The Atlantic Seaboard, a Battleground of Nature," June 1918; "The Warfare on Our Eastern Coast," September 1915; "Our Guardians of the Deep," June 1914; and "Pirate Rivers and Their Prizes," July 1926.

Bulletin No. 4, May 11, 1931.



© *Crété*

THIS PEACEFUL SCENE HIDES A THOUSAND TRAGEDIES OF THE SEA

Pointe du Raz, a dangerous rocky headland on the rugged coast of France, has been a ship graveyard for centuries. The ancient prayer of the Breton mariners still serves the sailor to-day: "Help me, O God, in crossing the Raz. My boat is so small and the sea is so large."

that it creates difficult problems of extraction from the ore. Chemists are at work on the ores so Russia must look to her newly re-won laurels.

Inch Makes 50,000-Mile Strand

Six tons of platinum seem a small supply to satisfy a metal-hungry world. But a little platinum goes a long way. A cubic inch of platinum can be drawn into wire practically invisible to the human eye, making a strand 50,000 miles long. In other words, 1 cubic inch of platinum can be stretched out to encircle the earth at the Equator twice!

In addition to its fashionable duties in jewelry platinum performs many little-known but necessary services to mankind. Radio tubes require platinum; automobiles require platinum points for ignition; photographs, X-rays, blasting, medicine, dentistry and the rayon industry employ platinum. Crucibles of platinum that withstand high temperatures and all acids except aqua regia are standard equipment in chemical laboratories. Last, but not least, platinum is the famous "middle-man" of chemistry, the catalyst, which, with the agency of electric current, performs marvels on many solutions and yet is itself as unaffected and continuously powerful as the strong man of the vaudeville team.

Note: Russia, Colombia and South Africa, the three chief producers of platinum, are described and pictured in the following articles in the *National Geographic Magazine*: "Some Impressions of 150,000 Miles of Travel," May, 1930; "Russia of the Hour," November, 1926; "Buenos Aires to Washington by Horse," February, 1929; "To Bogotá and Back by Air," May 1928; "Round About Bogotá," February, 1926; and "Under the South African Union," April, 1931.

Bulletin No. 5, May 11, 1931.

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A PRIMITIVE WASHTUB NEAR THE PLATINUM COUNTRY

Although the near-by hills at Orenburg produce the world's most precious metal these Soviet washwomen still do the family laundry in a hole cut in the ice of the Ural River. Orenburg is the capital of the Kirghiz Republic, a part of the Soviet Union.